



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Secretary

Through: Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks *T. Destry J. J. J.*

From: Acting Director *D. F. J.* AUG 7 2000

Subject: Strategic Path for the National Park Service Prescribed Fire Program

During the past several weeks, this office has engaged in a thoughtful examination of the National Park Service prescribed fire program. This internal program review incorporates the findings of the Cerro Grande Investigation Report, the Independent Board of Review, as well as many additional emerging issues related to the Cerro Grande Fire. As a result of our findings, we have identified a strategic path through which the agency can begin a phased reinstatement of the National Park Service prescribed fire program.

The attachment to this memo titled, "Increased Management Considerations in the Prescribed Fire Program: Three Phases of Reinstatement of the National Park Service Prescribed Fire Program" outlines in detail a series of action items and timelines that realign the prescribed fire program toward ensured success!

The three phases of program reinstatement specify the completion of a series of action items and issue papers. Various levels of program staff are involved in addressing the identified issues with each action item and paper having identified dates for completion.

Initially, between July 1 and October 1, 2000, national fire program staff and regional fire management officers will develop interim guidance by refining key decision tools used in the prescribed fire program. Review, clarification, and definition of critical program elements such as holding resources, contingency resources, risk assessment, situational awareness, project complexity rating, consequences of failure, and wildland urban interface will be completed.



Revised direction for prescription parameters within the prescribed fire burn plan will be developed and implemented. Lastly, a proposed design for an external prescribed fire project technical review process will be developed. The current prescribed fire moratorium will be in effect during this time.

Phase I initiates the "Reinstatement of Low Complexity, Low Consequence of Failure Burns West of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian, with the Exception of Wildland Urban Interface Prescribed Fire Activities." Phase I begins October 1 and ends December 30, 2000. During this phase, a white paper will be completed examining "Ecosystem Goals in Wildland Urban Interface." This document will also address partnership efforts that increase awareness of urban interface issues, as well as actions individuals and local communities can take to minimize property loss. Phase I will also begin incorporation and implementation of action items and recommendations from the investigation and subsequent reviews, including, the Independent Board of Review, General Accounting Office (GAO) Review, as well as the first of two reports from the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Review.

Phase II allows the "Reinstatement of High Complexity Prescribed Fire Projects, as well as Low Complexity, Low Consequence of Failure, Wildland Urban Interface Prescribed Fire Projects." During Phase II, all pertinent manuals and written agency guidance will be under revision based on the prescribed fire program findings to date. The timeframe for completing this task will be January 1 through March 1, 2001.

Phase III is the "Full Reinstatement of the Agency Prescribed Fire Program. This includes all Wildland Urban Interface Prescribed Fire Projects." Complete manual guidance and direction will be in place. All interim guidelines will be incorporated into appropriate agency documents. Investigation and formal review action items will be addressed to date. Ongoing monitoring and oversight of the agency prescribed fire program will be in place at the appropriate administrative levels. Phase III will be implemented March 1, 2001.

The strategic path presented above addresses the key program elements that play a critical role in the successful implementation of the prescribed fire program. The process for reinstating the prescribed fire program west of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian focuses on these essential program elements as well as the broader program challenges that have been identified through in-depth reviews.

Your concurrence with this strategic path is requested.

  
Concur: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: AUG 21 2000

Do Not Concur: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Attachment**

cc: Directorate and Associates, Sue Vap, National Fire Management Officer, NIFC



## **Increased Management Considerations in the Prescribed Fire Program: Three Phases of reinstatement of the National Park Service prescribed fire program.**

### **Development and Implementation of Interim Guidelines.**

**Time frame** – July 1 to October 1, 2000

#### **Process and Action Items -**

**Process:** Development and implementation of interim guidelines for prescribed fire program. Currently, national approval and project exemption criteria must be in place for limited, high priority, low risk prescribed fire projects (burns must meet criteria of high priority status and low risk categories, see June 15<sup>th</sup> memo to Regional Directors. These are burn projects where the consequence of failure is low). No Wildland Urban Interface prescribed fire projects are permitted. Revised direction on prescription parameters will be developed with the addition of a Go/No Go Checklist.

#### **Action Items and Task Groups:**

Development of Prescribed Fire Decision Tools:

- |  |             |  |
|--|-------------|--|
|  | <b>ASAP</b> | Fire Management Program Center (FMPC in Boise, ID) |
| • Definition of and redesign of Risk Assessment process                                |             |  |
| • Definition of and redesign Complexity Rating process                                 |             |  |
| • Agency definition and allocation process of holding resources.                       |             |  |
| • Agency definition, clarification of planning for and use of contingency resources.   |             |  |
| • Initiate study of situational awareness decision tools for prescribed fire.          |             |  |
| • Develop process to evaluate the consequences of failure in prescribed fire projects. |             |  |
| • Develop working definition of Wildland Urban Interface.                              |             |  |

Revised direction on prescription parameters, Burn Plan revision:

- |   |              |   |
|---|--------------|---|
| Risk assessment                               | <b>Sep 1</b> | FMPC/Fire Management Leadership Board     |
| Complexity analysis                           |              | (FMLB Includes FMPC Program Leads and the |
| Burn unit delineation                         |              | Regional Fire Management Officers)        |
| Identification of critical holding points     |              |   |
| Identification of holding forces              |              |   |
| Contingency planning –                        |              |   |
| Potential fire behavior outside unit          |              |   |
| Identification of initial contingency actions |              |   |
| Identification of contingency resources       |              |   |
| Identification of new strategy                |              |   |
| Budget planning considerations                |              |   |
| Qualifications by project complexity level    |              |   |

Proposed Design for External Technical Review

**Aug 15** FMLB

Use of AD Crews in Project Prep and Non-Fire Treatments

**Sep 1** FMLB

**Phase I - Reinstatement of Low Complexity, Low Consequences of Failure Burns west of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian. No Wildland Urban Interface prescribed fire activities will be considered.**

**Time frame** – October 1 to December 30, 2000.

**Process and Action Items** –

**Process:** Reintroduction of prescribed fire program, with the exception of Wildland Urban Interface prescribed fire projects, under revised planning and implementation guidelines. Regional approval of all low complexity, low consequences of failure prescribed burns west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian will be allowed.

**Action Items:**

White Paper: Ecosystem Goals in Wildland Urban Interface                      **Oct 1**      FMLB  
    Paper will explain the balance of ecosystem benefits with urban  
    interface concerns.

Incorporation and Implementation of Action Items and                      **Nov 30**      FMLB/FMPC  
Recommendations from the Investigation and Reviews:  
    Investigation Report,  
    Independent Board of Review,  
    GAO Review,  
    NAPA Phase I Report

**Phase II - Reinstatement of high complexity prescribed fire projects. Low complexity, low consequence of failure, Wildland Urban Interface prescribed fire projects will be allowed.**

**Time frame** – January 1 – March 1, 2001

**Process and Action Items -**

**Process:** Revise manual guidelines and direction. Incorporate all Interim Guidelines into DO-18, RM-18, or develop a handbook (reference book). Begin drafting an interagency handbook for prescribed fire.

**Action Items:**

Revision of RM-18 or development of prescribed fire handbook	<b>Jan 30</b>	FMPC
Continued focus on NAPA and other review recommendations	<b>Ongoing</b>	FMPC
Replace Chapter 9 with either new, detailed direction or with reference to new handbook.	<b>Feb 15</b>	FMPC

**Phase III - Reinstatement of full agency prescribed fire program. This includes all Wildland Urban Interface prescribed fire projects.**

**Time frame** – Beginning March 1, 2001

**Process and Action Items -**

**Process:** Complete manual guidance and direction will be in place. All interim guidelines will be incorporated into appropriate agency documents. Review and investigation action items and recommendations will have been addressed to date.

**Action Items:**

Ongoing monitoring and oversight of the agency prescribed fire program will be in place at the appropriate administrative levels.

